



Scotland Records of the Poor

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Introduction: The alleviation of poverty by various institutions in Scotland from medieval times until the present is a very large subject, which is of interest to a wide variety of researchers. Records of the poor exist from the 1500's, but the largest grouping of records in existence is not until the nineteenth century. Many of these later records give full family relationships and places of birth.

Where to learn about Scotland Records of the Poor

- [Familysearch.org](http://familysearch.org) through Family History Library and Centres. **Catalog.**
- wiki.familysearch.org search field = Scotland Poor
- Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Poor_Laws Scottish Poor
- Scottish Archive Network (SCAN) www.scan.org.uk **Catalog** and answers
- National Archives of Scotland www.nas.gov.uk **Now at** <http://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/> **which is the National Records of Scotland Catalog and digital Kirk Sessions.**
- Local Record Offices and Libraries in Scotland
- www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk

Poor Law prior to 1845

Parliamentary legislation concerning the poor began in the 15th century. Early statutes were mostly for the suppression of idle beggars, but gradually two important principles emerged. All parishes were to be responsible for their own poor, but only certain categories of poor were proper objects of poor relief.

The parish authorities responsible for the poor were inevitably the **kirk sessions** and the **heritors**. The 1579 act also provided that parishes might levy a poor rate, but in practice this was unusual. Even in the 1790s less than one hundred of the 878 parishes in Scotland imposed a rate, although by then the number was growing. For the most part the parishes relied on church collections, seat lettings, charitable mortifications and other sources of income.

Before 1845, under the old poor law, not all parishes kept formal records of poor. The only references to individual paupers, other than minutes of **kirk sessions** and **heritors** authorising payments, may be financial accounts. Where registers were kept, it was often the practice to have two rolls, a 'permanent roll' for paupers who were expected to

be chargeable for the remainder of their lives, and a roll of 'occasional poor' for the others.

Kirk Session = Church Elders and kept minutes and records on the people in the Parish.

Heritors = Privileged person in the parish and a proprietor of land and houses.

The system suited rural society reasonably well but was ill-adapted to the large industrial towns of the early 19th century, where the poor tended to be congregated in slum areas. The Industrial Revolution also brought cyclical trade depressions, with large numbers of able-bodied unemployed, who were not entitled to poor relief. In any case a church-based system could not be justified when so many had seceded from the established church. In 1843 a Royal Commission of Inquiry was appointed, whose recommendations led to reform two years later.

Poor Law Post 1844

The Poor Law (Scotland) Act 1845 established parochial boards in rural parishes and in the towns, and a central Board of Supervision in Edinburgh. The system of poor rates spread more widely, although it was still not universal even in the 1860s. The parochial boards built poorhouses for those categories of paupers who did not receive 'outdoor relief', normally in the form of small weekly sums of money.

Poorhouses or almshouses have existed in Scotland since medieval times, principally in burghs. Between 1845 and 1930 over 70 poorhouses were constructed in Scotland, many serving a number of parishes (called 'poor law unions' or 'combinations'). They were built following the Poor Law (Scotland) Act 1845, which established parochial boards in rural parishes and in the towns, and a central Board of Supervision in Edinburgh.

Poorhouse Records

The Board of Supervision issued detailed regulations for the records to be kept by poorhouse governors. They included a register of inmates with details, including the religious persuasion of each, a journal, which was an official log book or office diary, and a report book of offences against the rules of the poorhouse and punishments imposed. For many poorhouses all that survives are minute books of the managing committee or board, and these usually survive among county council or civil parish records held by local authority archives.

Substantial records survive for a few poorhouses, most notably those for Kyle Union poorhouse in Ayr, whose records (held by Ayrshire Archives) contain registers of inmates, financial records, punishment books, and plans. Where a poorhouse became a hospital, records (including registers of inmates) may survive among the records of the hospital concerned, held by the appropriate health board archive.

Registers of the Poor

Each parish had a poor roll, revised annually and available for public inspection. Paupers could only be admitted to the roll by order of the parochial board. The registers of poor, normally bound volumes of printed forms, contained the basic information about applicants admitted to the poor roll in this way. For each pauper the register gives the name, address, marital status, age, birthplace, occupation, whether disabled and if so how, financial circumstances, and a record of the decision by the parochial board as to how the case was to be dealt with.

In 1865 the Board of Supervision introduced new General Registers of Poor and Children's Separate Registers. The main change in the General Registers was that all references to an individual pauper were to be placed on the same form. This would lead to forms which are sometimes almost short biographies of paupers, with details about occasional contacts with the system over a period of decades. They will also give the religious denomination of the pauper and the names, ages and earnings of a husband or children, possibly even of brothers or other relatives. Apart from the basic record, they may include details of medical treatment, or more exceptionally family correspondence, news cuttings or even photographs.

Children's Separate Registers

Children's separate registers, also introduced in 1865, were for children who had been separated from their parents, for example by being orphaned or deserted or, as increasingly often in the large towns, by being boarded out to rural areas. The information they contain is similar to the general registers

Applications for Poor Relief

The applications for poor relief often survive as a separate series. Between 1845 and 1865 the information they contain is not much less than that in the registers of poor, but they are considerably less detailed than the general registers of poor introduced in 1865. For example, the application forms will not include the religious denomination, and probably there will be no details about dependants or other relatives. They will, however, contain far more entries per year than the registers, partly because of multiple applications from individual paupers, but also because they include the 'casual poor', that is, those relieved by the inspector without a decision by the board and therefore not on the poor roll.

What type of Records does the 1845 act produce

- Lists of Registered Poor
- Report books on Offenses and Punishments
- Applications for relief
- List of Children Boarded and Educated

These coverage is good for counties: Ayr, Dumfries, Lanark, Renfrew

General Register of The Poor 1865 Application or renewal

Genealogical Information on the application:

- Name
 - Residence
 - Place of birth
 - Condition: Single, married, widowed
- Age
Children and spouse
Religion

Other Records after 1865:

Lists of Register Poor that include:

Paupers residing in other parishes

Other parish poor

Paupers in poorhouse Lunatic Wards

Lunatics in Private Dwellings

Paupers residing in other Parishes

Paupers in institutions

Paupers in Lunatic Asylums

Applications for Relief include: Form details:

- Name
 - Date of Application
 - Age
 - If Married: When, Where and by whom
 - Wholly or partially disabled and reason for disablement
 - Earnings, Means, and Resources
 - Parentage: May contain their names, occupations, alive or dead, address
 - Name age of wife and children and may include birthdates and birthplaces
- Residence
Country and Place of Birth and Parish
Condition: Married, Single, Religion
Occupation

Other Poor Records:

- Settlement Records
- Lists of Children off roll and how disposed of
- Children Sent to School
- Children of Paupers at School and paid for by the Board
- List of Children who attended at Poorhouses
- Letters from ministers asking for poor relief
- Petitions which show parish inhabitants (Poor lists) (Enrolled Poor)

See Book: The Scottish Poor Law 1745-1845 by R.A. Cage FHL British 941 P3c